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ABSTRACT

A survey is presented of the status and usage patterns of the lingua francas--common languages used as a medium of communication between ethnically and linguistically diverse peoples--of the African continent. The survey gives an overview of the general language situation and briefly describes the major languages: Swahili, Hausa, Ffulde, Mandingo, Sango, Kanuri, Song'ai, Wolof, Lingala, Kituba, Umbundu, Nyanja, Lwena, Bemba, Fanagalo, Portuguese, English, French, Spanish, German, and Arabic. Notes on the linguistic and ethnic history contributing to the distribution of languages are included. A table summarizing this information for the languages and their dialect variants also gives estimates of the numbers of speakers, numbers of native speakers, and the usage status (increasing, decreasing, or stable), and a map illustrates areas of use of the major lingua francas. (MSE)

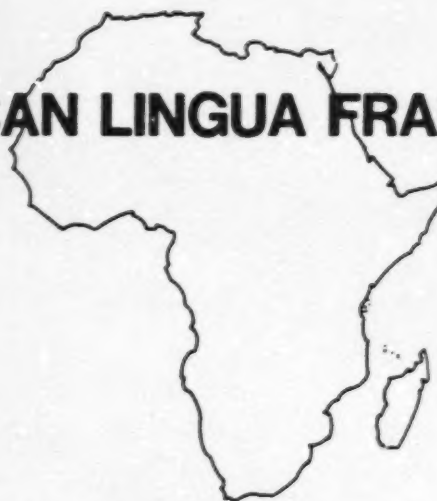
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AFRICAN LINGUA FRANCAS



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AFRICAN LINGUA FRANCAS

I. Introduction

This report will focus on the general status and usage patterns of the major lingua francas in Africa. It describes the general situation of the use of lingua francas on the African continent, and then briefly describes the specific major lingua franca languages. This report also includes a table which summarizes the information for these languages and their dialectal variants, including estimates of numbers of speakers, and a map which illustrates areas of use.

In an area as vast and ethnically and linguistically diverse as Africa, languages have developed as modes of communication between groups of people whose mother tongues are different. A lingua franca is generally understood to be a common language used as a medium of communication between such groups. It is unknown how many lingua francas are actually spoken in Africa. In many instances, ethnic group boundaries and political boundaries do not coincide, so that a language spoken in more than one country or over a large area may be regarded as a lingua franca because it is used across national boundaries, when in fact it is a mother tongue for members of essentially the same ethnic group which has been divided politically by the historical colonial division of the continent. On the other hand there are clearly languages which are used by a number of different ethnic groups for various purposes of communication across group boundaries, where the language may or may not be the mother tongue of one or the other group of the speakers.

What is generally significant for a lingua franca is that it is spoken by a large number of people for whom it is not the mother tongue and attains status as a vehicular language used for a specific communication purpose or sociolinguistic function such as trade and commerce, administration, religion, the military, communications and so on. In Africa, three categories of languages can be characterized which have fulfilled this purpose: (a) languages indigenous to Africa which spread beyond traditional ethnic or tribal boundaries; (b) so-called European or colonial languages, now also referred to as 'world' or international languages; and (c) pidgin languages which developed from either or both of the first two categories.

II. Uses of the Lingua Francas

The present status and influence of the African lingua francas has resulted from the linguistic and ethnic history of Africa, much affected by the policies of colonialization and the attitudes which developed in response to those policies. With the independence of the African nations and the movements toward national unity and authenticity which have developed in the African countries in the last two decades, the lingua francas have played an important role in the movements toward national integration. Few of the African languages were sufficiently widespread to serve as a medium of national communication. Consequently, the so-called colonial languages, either English, French or Portuguese, became and largely remain the main or sole official language and the language promoted officially as the lingua franca.

In most instances, however, English, French or Portuguese are still known only by an elite segment of the populations in the countries where they are official languages. It is of course to the advantage of such elites not to encourage the spread of the official language in countries where it is not widely known in order to preserve a favorable socioeconomic position. This can be seen in the instance of the continued status of French as the official language in Senegal although Wolof is known by as much as 80 per cent of the population; or in Kenya, where English remains the official language despite the widespread knowledge and use of Swahili.

Although opportunities exist for many people to learn the official languages informally, for example, through radio broadcasts, newspapers or television, from friends or relatives, many do not. Nevertheless, people do learn the major lingua francas which may not be the official languages. This is particularly true in urban areas where knowledge of one or more lingua francas may provide a socioeconomic advantage. It is common for the linguistic repertoire of members of the same household to be quite different. The husband and wife may have acquired and use different lingua francas based on the need to cope in a job setting versus a market setting. The parents may know the locally based lingua franca which they acquired informally, whereas the children may know the national lingua franca or the official language as a result of schooling. There is generally little use of the lingua franca in the home setting or private life. People use their mother tongue.

The majority of lingua francas in Africa are regional rather than national or international in spread. The language may be used in only a region of a country, often overlapping with the neighboring country. The exceptions are the international languages, English, French, Portuguese, Arabic, and, as noted above, the more widespread African languages: Swahili, Wolof, Mandingo (Bambara/Dyula), Hausa, Sango, Amharic, Lwena, Fulani, Fanagalo, Kituba, Lingala, and the other languages with a national base. Following is a summary of the current status of these major lingua francas.

III. The Major African Lingua Francas

SWAHILI is the most widely spoken African language and has a large number of dialects. Its spread as a lingua franca extends through Tanzania, where it is the official language, Kenya, Uganda, small parts of Ruanda and Burundi, Zaire, northern Madagascar, Zambia, Zanzibar, the Comoro islands and some other small areas through east and central Africa. Swahili has only a small number of native speakers and its spread has been facilitated by its relative neutrality from an ethnic standpoint.

Swahili is the most notable example of an African lingua franca spread through the presence of the Europeans. It had already spread through eastern Africa and westward toward the interior along the trade routes by the Swahili traders and Arabs. When the European powers took possession of the areas where Swahili had spread, the colonial administrations tended to institutionalize it as the main indigenous lingua franca. Swahili was systematically employed in government administration, army and postal services as well as in other fields. This was

facilitated by the work of the missionaries in developing written literature in Swahili, which included translations of religious works as well as grammatical and instructional texts. Smaller groups generally welcomed the spread of Swahili, recognizing the need for a means of intertribal communication by virtue of the restricted spread of their own languages. Larger ethnic groups resisted the lingua franca with a pronounced pride in their own languages and a resistance to anything foreign.

HAUSA is used as a lingua franca in Nigeria, where a core of native speakers is found, Niger, where it is spoken by a majority of the population, Ghana, Togo, Cameroon, Upper Volta, Senegal, Benin, Chad and the Sudan. Recent information from West Africa indicates that Hausa is still spreading at the expense of some of the local lingua francas and that the number of mother tongue speakers is on the rise.

Hausa was originally spread as a language of trade and continues to fulfill that role. It was adopted by the British colonial administration as a medium of communication in northern Nigeria and was subsequently included in colonial administration language policy.

FULFULDE (FULANI, PULAAR, PEUL, FUL, ADAMAWA, FUL-BE) is spoken in Ivory Coast, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Upper Volta, Benin, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria. It is also found with smaller numbers of users in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan. Many of the Fulani ethnic group in Mali and Nigeria, whose language it was originally, no longer speak Fulfulde. Its use as a lingua franca is generally restricted to certain regions within the countries where it is found. It is more widespread as an ethnic group mother tongue.

Fulfulde was initially spread as a result of the Jihad (holy war) led by the efforts of Ful tribesman Adama to islamize the empire established by the Ful Usman dan Fodio.

MANDINGO (MALINKE, BAMBARA, DJULA, JULA, DIOULA) covers an area in West Africa that includes Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Upper Volta, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Ghana. A dialect form of Mandingo has achieved quasi-official status in some of these countries and is a potential national language for Mali. Its greatest usefulness is as a lingua franca through much of West Africa since the various dialects of Mandingo are mutually comprehensible. Further spread of Mandingo is limited in the east by the spread of Hausa, and in the north by the spread of Arabic. The spread of Mandingo originated in its being the language of the Mali empire.

SANGO originated in and is most widely used in the Central African Republic, but its use as a lingua franca has also spread to Chad, Cameroon, and the northern portions of Zaire and the Republic of the Congo.

Sango was first used as a lingua franca of trade. It was already in use as

a trade language along the Ubangi River when the French arrived in that part of Africa. It was spread with the advancement of the French along the Ubangi.

KANURI is now used mainly in Niger and Nigeria, and somewhat in Chad and Cameroon. It has been losing ground to Hausa in much of the area where it previously dominated as a lingua franca.

Kanuri was originally the language of the Kanem-Bornu empire. The colonialization of Africa was largely responsible for the decline in importance of Kanuri. Until the 19th century, Kanuri was the predominant lingua franca in the Sudan. The collapse of the empire and the spread of Hausa severely diminished the importance of Kanuri as a lingua franca.

SONG'AI (SONGHAY, SONAY) is now found only in Benin, Mali, Niger and Upper Volta. It has become more of an inter-regional language than a lingua franca, that is, it is spoken by groups found across national boundaries, but it is still a second language for people in those areas where it is found. Song'ai was the language of the empire of the same name.

WOLOF is spoken by the majority (estimated at 80%) of the population of Senegal. Its spread as a lingua franca is due in part to the large size of the ethnic group for which it is a mother tongue, and in part to this group's early contact with the Europeans who gave it additional prominence among the vernaculars. Wolof is also used in the Gambia. Use of Wolof in Senegal continues to expand.

LINGALA is found principally in Zaire and the Congo. It occupies a significant political role in Zaire as the official language of the ruling party and of the military, which contributes to its spread throughout the country as a lingua franca. Lingala first spread as a trade language and was later adopted for use by the military in the Congo, further contributing to its expansion. The popularity of Zairian music is perhaps presently most responsible for the growing number of people who use Lingala.

KITUBA (KIKONGO COMMERCIAL/VEHICULAIRE, KIKONGO YA LETA) is spoken in Zaire and the Congo. The role of Kituba as a lingua franca is being limited by the spread of Lingala. In some areas there is a preference for the vernacular form of the language, Kikongo.

American Mennonite missionaries were responsible for the development of Kituba, a variant of Kikongo which was taken up by the missionaries and used as the basis for school instruction and religious teaching. Kituba was further spread through trade.

UMBUNDU is the language of the Ovimbundu ethnic group in Angola and is used as a lingua franca throughout the entire southern portion of Angola. Its use is spreading in that country however largely because of the size of the ethnic group for which it is the vernacular and their role as traders throughout the growing portion of the country. Umbundu was spread inland from the coast to the frontier of what was the Belgian Congo by the construction of the Benguela railroad by the Portuguese administration in the Angola territory.

NYANJA (CHEWA, CHICHEWA) is spoken as a lingua franca in almost all of Malawi, in eastern Zambia, and in parts of Mozambique bordering on Malawi. It has achieved national status in Malawi.

Nyanja (Chewa) spread through the early contact between the Nyanja and Europeans, with the Nyanja developing into a class of skilled workers who subsequently spread into wider areas. The Europeans made Nyanja an official language of the police and military which resulted in its spread through Zambia and Malawi.

LWENA is used as a lingua franca in eastern Angola, southwestern Zaire and the northwestern part of Zambia. It is spoken as a second language in particular by the Lunda, Luchaze (Luchazi) and Chokwe. It has gained some recognition in Zambia through its use in primary education. It spread as a lingua franca along the copper belt, but further expansion was limited by the presence of Bemba and Fanagalo.

BEMBA (TOWN-BEMBA) is found as a lingua franca throughout the so-called copper belt which runs through south central Africa and includes Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi. The spread in Malawi is limited by the use of Nyanja as the lingua franca there. The relatively greater prestige of Town-Bemba among Africans over Fanagalo contributes to its continued growth in the copper mining areas. It originally spread through the mining areas along the copper belt.

FANAGALO is presently found in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. Outside of South Africa, however, use of Fanagalo is declining. It holds little prestige among Africans who view it as the language of the White oppressors. In Zimbabwe, its role as a lingua franca is being replaced by English. Even in South Africa it is used primarily for communication between Whites and Africans in work situations. Knowledge of Fanagalo there is often considered a prerequisite for obtaining work in the mines. It developed along the mining belt in southern Africa through contact between Nguni (a Zulu language), English and Afrikaans.

IV. International Languages as Lingua Francas

The arrival of the Europeans in Africa and the subsequent colonialization radically affected the lingua franca situation which already existed among the African languages. Portuguese was introduced along the coast in the mid-1400's and was used for centuries in the trading posts and forts. Portuguese missions into the interior did not have a sustained impact, but prepared the way for the later arrival of the British.

Presently Portuguese is the official language in Angola, Mozambique and the Cape Verde islands. Its use is spreading in Angola with the increase in the level and expanse of education as well as through the influence of radio and television.

English was also introduced through the string of trading posts along the coast in the late 1400's, often obtained through takeover from the Portuguese. It was not until the missionary settlements were established beginning in the late 1700's that English spread further along the coast and inland to what is now Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon.

English has official status in all the former British colonies, with the exception of Tanzania which changed to Swahili. The use of English as a lingua franca is spreading, particularly among the current generation of Africans in these areas. The advantages in knowing English to advance socioeconomically are widely known and the advancement in levels of education are making the learning of the language more accessible to growing numbers. English is perhaps regarded as less of an oppressor colonialist language than any of the other languages of the colonizers of Africa. This is attributable to the manner in which the British accorded the colonies a great deal of local autonomy under their rule.

French spread both along the coast and inland after the establishment of the first fort at St. Louis du Senegal in 1638. The strongly centralized administration of the colonial territories by the French resulted in the centralization and compactness of areas where French was, and is, used.

French is presently found retaining official status and high prestige among all the former French colonies in West Africa and in Zaire, formerly the Belgian Congo. The use of French as a lingua franca is spreading in some of these areas, but its expansion is not as great of that of English.

Spanish is limited to Equatorial Guinea, taken over in the 1800's from the Portuguese.

German arrived in the 1880's as a result of the scramble for colonial territories in Africa. German influence was short-lived since these territories were placed under the protection of the League of Nations and the administration of the French and British following World War I. Although the German language did not significantly affect the language situation German missionaries did. Some of the leading missionaries in Sierra Leone, Nigeria and along the Gold Coast had been Germans, and while they did not promote German, they were largely responsible for initiating African studies. Although German is not currently used in any countries in Africa, it is likely to become more important as a language to be studied in school and the university as the countries advance in science and technology.

Arabic spread through the islamicization of parts of Africa as well as the influence of Arab traders throughout the continent. Historically it was the first of the world languages to arrive in Africa through the drive of the Almoravid dynasty in the 11th century. Islam spread through West Africa from the north and east down to the north of Cameroon, through present-day Nigeria.

The islamicization process is continuing in many areas of Africa and Arabic is often found sharing official status in islamicized countries or serving as an important second or third language. Its expansion continues in northern, central, eastern and western Africa.

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STATUS AND USE OF MAJOR AFRICAN LINGUA FRANCA

Lingua Franca	Dialects/ Variants	Area of Use	Total Number of Speakers (1984 Estimate)	Native Speakers (1984 Estimate)	Usage Status
Arabic	Turku, Mongalese, Shua, Maghrebi, Hassaniya, etc	Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Chad, Senegal, Djibouti, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Ethiopia	250.0 M	132.0 M	Increasing
Bemba	Town Bemba	Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zaire, Tanzania	1.5 M	.8 M	Stable
English	Various pidgin forms	Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, St. Helena, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	?	?	Increasing
Fanagalo	Fanekalo, Fanakalo, Kitchen Kaffir, Mine Kaffir	South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe	?	--	Decreasing
French	Various pidgin forms	Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoro Islands, Congo, Djibouti, Gabon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Malagasy, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Reunion, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Togo, Tunisia, Upper Volta, Zaire	?	?	Increasing
Fulfulde	Pulaar, Peul, Fulani, Ful, Adamawa, Ful-Be, etc.	Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Upper Volta, Benin, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Chad, Sudan, Central African Republic	10.6 M	7.1 M	Stable
Hausa		Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, Togo, Cameroon, Upper Volta, Senegal, Benin, Chad, Sudan	28.0 M	19.0 M	Increasing
Kanuri	Manga, Lare, Kagama, Bornu, Sirata	Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon	3.5 M	3.0 M	Decreasing
Kituba	Kikongo Commercial, Kikongo Vehiculaire, Kikongo ya Leta, Kisodi, Kungala, Monokutuba	Angola, Zaire, Congo	2.0 M	--	Stable
Lingala	Bangala, Ngala, Mangala	Zaire	12 M	9.4 M	Increasing

STATUS AND USE OF MAJOR AFRICAN LINGUA FRANCA/2

Lingua Franca	Dialects/ Variants	Area of Use	Total Number of Speakers (1984 Estimate)	Native Speakers (1984 Estimate)	Usage Status
Lwena	Luena, Lovale, Luvale	Angola, Zaïre, Zambia	?	?	Stable
Mandingo	Malinke, Bambara, Djula, Jula, Dioula, Mandekan, Kaugbe	Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Upper Volta, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana	9.0 M	4.1 M	Stable
Nyanja	Chewa, Chichewa	Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique	4.0 M	2.5 M	Stable
Portuguese	Various pidgin forms	Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome e Principe	?	?	Increasing
Sango	Sango Commercial	Central African Republic, Chad, Cameroon, Zaïre, Congo	2.2 M	.3 M	Increasing
Song'ai	Sonay, Songhay	Benin, Mali, Benin, Upper Volta	2.2 M	1.8 M	Stable
Swahili	Kiswahili, Mbalazi, Bajuni, Siu, Pate, Amu, Mvita, Fundi, Tanga, Mrima, Mgao, Phemba, Tumbatu, Hadimu, Unguja	Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ruanda, Burundi, Zaïre, Madagascar, Zambia, Zanzibar, Comoros	30.0 M	1.4 M	Increasing
Umbundu		Angola	3.0 M	1.4 M	Increasing
Wolof		Senegal, Gambia	4.5 M	2.7 M	Increasing

AREAS OF USAGE OF THE MAJOR AFRICAN LINGUA FRANCAS

